



Frequently Asked Questions About Proposed Renton Zoning

Introduction

The recommendation for rezoning shown on the enclosed map was developed at the request of the City of Renton by a citizen group called the East Renton Plateau Citizen Task Force. This task force is composed of a group of citizen volunteers, appointed by the Mayor, approved by the City Council, and established to review community planning issues. The task force members were recruited through the Four Creeks Unincorporated Area Council, the Citizens Alliance for a Responsible Evendell, the Five Star Athletic Club, and through advertisement in the Renton Reporter. Individuals on the task force represent themselves rather than any organizations. The group is reviewing zoning in the urban portion of the East Renton Plateau area and advising the Renton Planning Commission and City Council.

The following information was developed by the City of Renton staff and reviewed by the task force members and it is intended to provide information about issues associated with proposed rezoning.

1. Why is the East Renton Plateau area included in the urban portion of the Urban Growth Boundary, how was that decision made, and why is Renton planning for this area?

Creation of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) was mandated by the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990. The County, in consultation with cities, is required to establish a UGB and define areas within the boundary as “urban” and areas outside the boundary as “rural”. The “urban” area includes all land already in cities, and lands in the unincorporated area that can accommodate enough new development to meet required 20 year growth targets. Land within the “urban” area is planned for urban levels of service and development, and land in the “rural” area is restricted from additional development. The East Renton Plateau was divided by adoption of the UGB line into both urban and rural portions. This line goes down SE 128th St, south to SE 132nd St, and out to 184th Ave SE (see Prezoning Map). The areas north of SE 128th St and east of the White Fence Ranch subdivision at 156th Ave SE are rural, and the area south and west are urban. This boundary was reviewed and modified by a citizen task force in 1992 and adopted into the King County and Renton Comprehensive Plans in 1994.

All of the land between the Renton city limits and the Urban Growth Boundary is defined as “urban” and as part of Renton’s Potential Annexation Area (PAA). The East Renton Plateau PAA is just one of many PAAs in King County. Designation as a PAA means that the adjacent city will eventually provide urban services to the area and that eventually annexation will be considered. There is no mandated timetable in state law for annexation.

The growth boundary and PAAs are part of an adopted regional policy established by the King County Growth Management Planning Council, an organization made up of elected officials from King County and the cities within it, to implement the GMA. Under these regional policies, all cities with a designated PAA are required to plan for that area in their Comprehensive Plans. Planning law also allows jurisdictions to also designate “prezoning” for these areas but adoption of “prezoning” is not required. “Prezoning” is a zoning decision that is made prior to annexation.

2. How is the adoption of prezoning related to the proposed Preserve Our Plateau Annexation (POPA)?

Annexation is a separate consideration and is not part of this proposal. “Prezoning” can exist in a dormant state indefinitely. If the annexation fails, the “prezoning” will still be in place. If the annexation is approved, the “prezoning” becomes the adopted zoning for the property in the annexed area upon the effective date of the annexation. The “prezoning” proposal will affect all of the East Renton Plateau area, not just the area proposed for annexation. Residents within the POPA boundary, accounting for two thirds of the total urban East Renton Plateau area, will vote on the annexation on February 6, 2007. The City of Renton wants to communicate planning policy information so that residents can understand and have confidence in Renton’s ability to address growth.

3. Since this area is in King County, what allows Renton to enact zoning for it?

“Prezoning” is a zoning decision that is made prior to annexation. State law allows municipalities to “prezone” areas within designated PAAs before any annexation decisions are made. “Prezoning” allows residents and property owners to understand how the City would handle zoning and development. It is adopted by city ordinance but does not go into effect unless an annexation is approved separately.

4. What is being proposed?

The “prezoning” proposal was developed by the East Renton Citizens Task Force members. The task force recommends a combination of Resource Conservation (RC), Residential 1 (R-1), and Residential 4 (R-4) zoning in areas now designated with R-4 zoning under King County. A small area of 6.15 acres, that is designated Residential Single Family (RSF) in Renton’s Comprehensive Plan, is proposed for Residential 8 (R-8) zoning.

State law requires cities to plan for all lands within their designated PAAs and consequently Renton’s Comprehensive Plan has included land use policy for the East Renton Plateau area since 1993. However, specific zoning has never been reviewed. A city’s Comprehensive Plan is the broad planning document that identifies policies for future growth of the city. Zoning is used to implement the Comprehensive Plan. The “prezoning” will determine which implementing zones will be applied in the urban portion of the East Renton Plateau area.

5. What are the eligible zones used for “prezoning” and what is the City’s policy for growth in the East Renton Plateau area?

The Renton Comprehensive Plan designates the majority of this area as “Residential Low Density (RLD),” allowing single family dwellings up to a “cap” of four dwelling units per net acre. Three possible zoning classifications are allowed in “RLD”: **Resource Conservation** (one dwelling unit per ten acres), **Residential 1** (one dwelling unit per net acre), and **Residential 4** (four dwelling units per net acre). Prezoning will designate which of these zones would be applied in the urban parts of the community and will become the adopted policy of the City for zoning the area. A small area of 6.15 acres is designated RSF in Renton’s Comprehensive Plan and is eligible for **Residential 8** (eight dwelling units per net acre) zoning.

6. Will Renton change its zoning policies to allow up-zoning at a later time?

Rezoning could only occur within the choice of zones allowed in the Comprehensive Plan, for example, from RC to R-1 or from R-1 to R-4. In the RLD area, increasing the allowable density above the “cap” of four dwelling units per acre would require a significant change in city policy because it would be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan. R-8 zoning is limited to the 6.15-acre area designated RSF and could not be expanded or contracted without a change in the Comprehensive Plan.

Renton planning policies for the area were reviewed in 2004. The City evaluated land use development trends and decided to change the Comprehensive Plan to allow less density in this area, reducing maximum allowed density from eight dwelling units per net acre to four dwelling units per net acre, except for the small 6.15-acre area. Residents also identified issues of concern, including higher-density, small-lot development, increased traffic, the loss of larger lots, tree canopy and suburban character. Part of the City’s adopted policy encourages a wide range of housing types, including larger lot development and “estate” housing in areas with environmental constraints and lower density land patterns. The urban portion of the East Renton Plateau area is now designated for this lower-density approach.

7. How can Renton have lower density than King County?

The County and all cities have growth targets assigned through regional planning policy. King County's growth targets are for the urban areas that are now outside cities, but within the Urban Growth Boundary. These areas must be zoned for enough future growth to achieve these targets. Because the County has limited commercial areas and no urban centers where growth can be concentrated, the County must meet its growth targets in the largely residential areas outside cities. This situation causes lands in urban King County to continue to be zoned at greater density than historic levels.

Cities can determine where, within their city limits, different densities and activities will occur. Renton is a full-service city with a growing and redeveloping urban center. Renton's overall growth strategy is to concentrate the majority of future growth in its urban center, where it can be served by transit and contribute to a revitalized city center. Because the City can meet its assigned growth targets within the downtown and existing city limits, Renton is able to respond to neighborhood concerns by significantly reducing density on the East Renton Plateau.

8. My property is "R-4" in King County. What are differences between Renton's R-4 or R-1 and King County's R-4 zoning?

King County allows residential development based on gross density, meaning the number of houses allowed is based on total parcel acreage, times the maximum density allowed in the zoning. King County zoning also allows bonuses and transfer of development rights up to 20 percent above the maximum density. Renton uses a net density calculation, meaning the total acreage minus critical areas and roads, times the maximum density in zoning. Renton does not allow density bonuses or transfer of development rights. Renton's R-4 regulations result in residential development patterns that will be lower by approximately 20 to 40 percent, compared with King County's R-4 regulations using bonuses. King County does not offer an R-1 zoning option in this area.

9. If Renton's zoning is supposed to result in lower density than King County, why is 128th St/NE 4th St so densely developed?

Some development along 128th St was already "grandfathered" using the King County regulations when it annexed. The differences in gross and net density, as outlined in Question 8, as well as smaller lot sizes and building setbacks allowed by King County, have contributed to more dense residential development in the urban portion of the East Renton Plateau area. In addition, some of the area was "grandfathered" to eight dwelling units per acre under Renton regulations. The last new housing area already in the City limits was developed under R-5 zoning, a discontinued zone, now replaced by R-4. This zoning change was based on public comment that the quality and density of this prior development did not meet the vision and direction of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

10. What will happen with the parks under Renton "prezoning"?

Parks remain parks in the Renton zoning system. Parks are zoned the same as the lands that surround them. Parks are an "allowed use" in all three zones under consideration. These lands would be zoned in residential classifications, but used for parks. They would not be available for development. Park lands include Maplewood Park at SE 138th St and 144th Avenue SE and Maplewood Heights Park at 168th Avenue SE and SE 140th Street. The City and County are now discussing how park lands will be transferred to the City if a future annexation were to occur.

11. What will happen with the schools under Renton "prezoning"?

Zoning will not change the schools, school districts, or school district boundaries. School lands will be assigned the same zoning classification as the surrounding area. Schools are an "allowed use" in all proposed zones. Most of the urban East Renton Plateau area is in the Issaquah School District and this would not change with Renton zoning.

12. Will sewer requirements change under Renton “prezoning”?

No. Renton is the designated sewer provider for the urban portion of the East Renton Plateau area. “Prezoning” does not affect the provision of sewer service. Existing development on septic will not be required to connect to sewer. R-4 zoning and above anticipates urban services under both King County and Renton zoning.

13. What are the different proposed zoning classifications and what do they mean?

There are four zones possible for the East Renton Plateau urban area in the existing Renton Comprehensive Plan. Three zones implement the RLD policies and one zone implements the RSF policies. The RSF area is limited to 6.15-acres.

Residential Low Density (RLD) Zones

1. Resource Conservation (RC) Zone:

The RC zone is a very low-density residential zone that provides some residential use of lands that contain critical areas or lands with agricultural uses. This zone promotes uses that are compatible with critical areas and allows for continued production of food and agricultural products. The RC zone is also intended to provide separation between intense urban uses and allow viable recreation activity.

2. Residential 1 (R-1) Zone:

The R-1 zone allows residential development of lands with critical areas where limited residential development will not compromise the critical areas. The zone also provides for suburban estate single family and clustered single family residential dwellings, at a maximum density of one dwelling unit per net acre and allows for small-scale farming associated with residential use. It is further intended to provide separation between communities through designation of urban separators.

3. Residential 4 (R-4) Zone:

The R-4 zone promotes urban single family residential neighborhoods serviceable by urban utilities and containing amenity open spaces. The R-4 zone will allow a maximum net density of four dwelling units per net acre. The R-4 designation serves as a transition between rural designation zones and higher density residential zones.

Residential Single Family (RSF) Zone

4. Residential 8 (R-8) Zone:

The R-8 zone allows single family residential dwellings at a range of four to eight dwelling units per net acre. Development in the R-8 zone is intended to create opportunities for new single family residential neighborhoods and to facilitate high-quality infill development that promotes reinvestment in existing single family neighborhoods. It is intended to accommodate uses that are compatible with and support a high quality residential environment and add to a sense of community.

To give comments or request information, contact staff at

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